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Coded Daily Communication Log Providing Client's Health Updates

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Abstract

Direct care staff of adults with developmental disabilities are not provided with information about changes to clients' physical and mental health. The Gateway Center of Monterey is a non-profit organization that provides a day program for adults with developmental disabilities to assist clients to live as independently as possible. Factors Contributing to this issue include time constraints, inadequate information provided to staff to adjust individual care, and staff resources being taxed to accommodate clients' changing needs. The communication deficiency led to clients' changing needs not being met, staff needing to be equipped to accommodate changing needs, and communication breakdown between staff members. A daily communication log was developed and given to staff to increase communication between staff in different classrooms of the Day Program. The daily communion log is posted for staff to document clients' healthcare changes that all staff can reference to adjust clients' care during the day program. The communication log resulted in a source to provide information to staff that needed to be improved about their clients changing health to modify how they cared for clients. The information provided met staff members' goal to be better prepared to serve their clients. It is recommended for staff to incorporate communication from the residential and medical departments during the day program for clients changing needs.

Keywords: developmental disabled, day program, direct care professional, communication, collaboration, adults, time management

Agency & Communities Served

The Gateway Center of Monterey, located in Pacific Grove, California, provides a Day Program for adults with developmental disabilities. Monterey County's population includes 5.2% of the population that has a disability under the age of sixty-five (U.S. Census, n.d). The population served at Gateway Center in the Day Program fall under the definition of having a disability because they have one or more functioning issues with their hearing, vision, cognition, or ambulation (U.S. Census, n.d.). The overall purpose of the Day Program is to provide clients with the opportunity to be socially active within their community while learning new skills and knowledge to be as independent as possible outside of their homes. Opportunities offered include cultural and educational experiences, exercise programs, and recreational outings, including volunteering around the Monterey Peninsula Community. The program is available Monday through Friday, nine a.m. to two p.m., on the grounds of Gateway Center, and is administered by Gateway staff with a ratio of one staff member per three clients.

Their mission statement is "at Gateway Center of Monterey County, we serve adults with Developmental Disabilities. We fully support their rights and choices and empower them to live full and productive lives with dignity and independence within the community" (Gateway, n.d., para. #1). "The mission" is followed to ensure the clients of their program live the best possible life. Gateway Center's vision ensures that "core values are guided by the following principles that dictate everything we do: Rights, Choices, and Opportunities for growth of everyone we serve" (Gateway, n.d., para. #2)."

Problem Model Background and Literature Review

Problem Statement

Contributing Factors

Time Constraints

The time restraints on DSP leave little room to know their clients personally. This shows how clients' direct care resources are impacted by the efficiency goals of the organization versus what is required by the client from the direct care personnel. Gateway day program staff are responsible for getting clients up in the morning, helping them bathe, dress for the day and help prepare breakfast during the first two hours of their shifts. They are then required to take clients to the day program where they are expected to run three classroom sessions in addition to assisting with preparing lunch for clients. Because staff members are constantly working with multiple clients at a time, they have no time to observe if there have been any behavioral or physical changes of client from their last shift. Some clients are able to communicate that something has changed in their health but are not able to convey specifics of the changes or what changes in care are required. Other clients are non verbal and have no way to communicate to staff. In most cases, staff that take care of clients in the residential program are able to witness changes first hand, becoming the only source of information the day program staff can rely on to make appropriate changes to their care. Developing a formal way to communicate will help efforts for staff members to communicate better with each other and department heads, making the entire team more productive (Buntinx, 2008).

Working with adults with developmental disabilities is a field that can be very challenging because of complex mental and physical disabilities. Sometimes the challenges are overwhelming for staff and can lead to burnout without proper support (Institute on Community Integration Publications, n.d).

This acknowledges the dilemma but also puts the power of positive change into retention of DSPs for longer term employment. Many strategies and tools have been suggested to help staff understand the responsibilities of their positions. Tools, agency resources and training opportunities that are at the staff's disposal, are developed to make the shifts function as efficiently as possible. Completing necessary tasks will involve the whole staff working together to make sure their time is well spent for the benefit of clients' care (Institute on Community Integration Publications, n.d).

Current Communication is Inadequate

The psychological impacts of ineffective communication can affect the work output of staff with negative results. It is known that if things are not run smoothly, clients can feel the effects on the programs they attend. Staff can only compensate for flaws for so long before it will impact them personally. Understanding how the staff is impacted is critical in providing adequate tools for them to excel. Problems need to be addressed before the staff is worn out (Direct Care Professional Network, 2017).

The expectations of DSP in their roles are outlined in their job descriptions. In addition to referencing job descriptions, it is important for staff to have regular communication from management and co-workers. This will enable staff to meet performance expectations and receive the support they need to do their jobs well. Lack of communication impacts their effectiveness of care with their clients. Research has shown that the more information staff has

access to, the more likely they will meet the expectations of both employers and clients (Pettit et al., 1997).

Resources are Taxed

Noting what staff observe in a given shift is important to document in a personal notebook that a staff member can keep but this is only one piece of communication. This can be a tool for tracking major changes in clients' physical or behavioral health but it needs to be communicated to all staff (Direct Care Professional Network, 2017)

Communication is essential to make sure clients get what they need. The Direct Care Professional Network has identified these barriers with DSPs and has made suggestions on how to resolve them in this unique field (Direct Care Professional Network, 2017).

Consequences

Clients Changing Needs Not Met

Communication is one of many tools and resources missing for staff to do their jobs effectively. Research has proven that DSPs do not stay in their jobs longer because of a variety of factors, including communication issues (McCallion & Nickle, n.d). Challenges that staff encounter include client tantrums related to frustrations with changes in mobility limitations that clients did not experience before and now need to learn how to cope with those changes. Several clients experience dementia that is a natural part of aging, but without the diagnosis of the illness, staff will know that it is developing and how to change their care of the client to accommodate their new challenges. These issues, along with many other physical and mental changes, can be accommodated once they are communicated to staff so they can receive additional training from Gateway Center management to understand what changes in care are needed. Staff will be able to tailor care based on the individual's specific needs. Without

communication, staff can become burned out from trying to figure out what has changed and how to deal with those changes. Clients' conditions can rapidly decline because of a staff that is unaware and unable to assist the clients deal with changing health issues.

Staff members need to have regular communication and training in order to adapt to clients' changing needs. The inconsistency of the workforce impacts how effectively staff works together. Each time new staff is hired, they have to adapt to the staff that is already there. They also need to quickly learn clients' current state of being in order to identify and communicate changes in clients physical or behavioral health to other staff members. Clients may be consistent in their day to day level of health, requiring no changes in the way staff takes care of them. Others may exhibit changes in their health that require staff to assist them on a more constant basis. These changes could include helping clients eat during lunch time when they did not require assistance before or the client was able to use the restroom without assistance before. Because of their physical limitates becoming increasingly involved, they now require assistance. The time it takes to develop a well-in-sync team delays focus on clients' changes and how the program and staff need to adapt to these changes (American Network of Community Options, and Resources, 2017). DSPs are caregivers that need to connect what is happening to what is needed to make sure clients are receiving the full benefits of the Day program. They must advocate for resources for themselves to take care of their clients (McCallion & Nickle, n.d).

Staff Ill Equipped

Information about clients' general health and behaviors need to be shared amongst staff. Staff need to know how clients' physical and mental health are changing in order to adapt how they care for these individuals during their shifts. This is why it is essential for staff to receive regular communication about clients' physical and behavioral changes on a daily basis. Delays in

care and the efficiency of how the Day program is run occur if staff need to take time to determine what health changes have occurred with each client and how to address those changes (Larson & Hewitt, 2005). Communication challenges about their health come with the restraints of HIPAA privacy laws made while relaying this information. This is an important concern when addressing clients' changing health concerns so their rights are protected (Office of Civil Rights, 2022).

Communication Breakdown

Clients of the Gateway Center Day program rights are protected by the Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act of 2000 that must be adhered to by staff at all times. Improved communication is critical but their rights cannot be violated. How staff communicate must be appropriate and approved by the clients they are charged with. The Bill of Rights is a list of rights that protect the developmentally disabled from being abused or harmed in any way (Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act, 1990). There are also measures to make sure that individuals are involved in decisions about their daily care and have a voice in how they live their lives. The right to receive appropriate care and treatment in the least intrusive manner are important rights that the staff at Gateway Center must uphold while taking care of the clients during the Day program. Staff must be aware at all times of their clients changing needs in order to help them live the best quality of life possible. Effective communication between staff members supports clients' appropriate care. When changes in clients' physical health or behavior change, the staff must make accommodations to help clients adjust to those changes. If changes or problems are not conveyed to the staff in regular fashion, clients' physical and mental health may be at risk. Procedural changes in how staff take care of clients evolving mental and health changes will directly impact how clients are able to adapt and

change to the events that are occurring with their physical being (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2022). Client's who do not receive proper care from staff may experience a rapid decline in their general health.

Delay in Progress

An optimum level of health can be achieved by people with developmental disabilities just like any human being. State Licensing for Day programs play a role in how clients are cared for while they are at Gateway Center. When basic information about changes in behavioral or physical health is not conveyed to all staff charged with their care, delays in how they adapt can occur (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2020). It is important for staff to be aware of how delays with information about their client's health can directly affect their happiness in the Day program.

Staff is a key component in how successful a program is for its clients. Research shows how well-informed staff is about their client's disabilities and changing healthcare needs impacts how they are able to excel while in the Day program (Direct Care Professional Network, 2017).

Challenges are addressed when care is not meeting their goals while in the program. The problem model in Figure One addresses current challenges staff members at Gateway Center are facing to give their clients the best care possible. Without continuous analyses of client's conditions, they could be delayed in experiencing the full benefits of the program (Krahn et al., 2015).

Figure One: Problem Model

Contributing Factors	Problem	Consequences
Time constraints	Staff receiving limited information about clients	Clients changing needs not met

Current communication is inadequate	changing needs	Staff ill equipped
Resources are taxed		Communication Breakdown

Project Description and Justification

Staff members need a way to be updated about clients' physical and mental health changes in a streamlined manner as they start a shift. Previously, a daily detailed log was kept by Gateway Center staff on each client. These logs include information about any physical and behavioral issues or changes, how they participated during the program that day, and how annual goals were being met. This information is critical to follow the progress of clients but can be overwhelming to read for a staff member just starting their shift. The proposed project is to generate a quick glance at one sheet with clients' names, referred to as the "log". The log will consist of a block chart with colors corresponding to the current status of each clients' behavioral and physical status. All clients' names will appear on a sheet of paper, referred to as the "log", with a block chart with colors corresponding with the current status of clients' behavioral and physical issues. The color green will indicate no changes since the last shift, yellow will indicate a behavioral change, and red will indicate a physical change. There will be a column to the immediate left of the color code chart to briefly describe the change and let staff know how to adapt for those clients that have a yellow or red code next to their names. I will be developing the format of the log, including inputting names, a legend for the meaning of the color codes, a chart for color codes to be inserted, and a place for a brief description of changes in clients' welfare from the previous shift.

Project Justification

The primary purpose of the project is to provide staff with an effective communication tool to help them accommodate clients' needs in a timely manner. This project addresses whether staff are receiving current information in a timely manner in a format that can be easily understood. By having the log available, the agency is able to have staff start a shift with updates on things that occurred while they were off, to be better prepared to take care of clients during the Day program.

Client's are encouraged to live as independently as possible despite their physical and mental limitations. Lack of communication about changing needs could hamper this objective. Following the mission statement of Gateway Center includes this objective. In order to achieve this goal, staff must be able to implement a way to work with health limits without restricting their ability to do things on their own. Constantly following a formal plan of communication that brings all departments together that directly take care of clients will help them thrive well into the future. Staff require a consistent form of communication in order to develop a plan to accommodate their clients changing needs. The log proposed will be a consistent, streamlined method to receive information about what changes have occurred without taking time away from client care. Once the staff is able to develop a plan to accommodate the individual's new needs, they will continue to update the log with code changes or notes as needed. This will provide an ongoing dialog with other staff members that refer to this log. These steps will help ensure that the client is getting the appropriate care while the staff of the Day program is receiving information in a timely manner.

Benefits

This program will provide more effective communication and time management for the staff to focus on their most important task, their clients, instead of figuring out changes in

behavior or physical problems. Staff will also be better prepared to adapt and deal with situations that come up with clients faster. This will prevent a disruption in the client's experience or others participating in the Day program. Staff members will be able to adjust their care so they are more efficient at completing tasks in a timely manner. They will no longer need to take the time to figure out what changes had occurred since the last time they attended the day program. Staff can alter their care and proceed to run the program with limited interruption. Staff will then be able to enjoy program activities with clients, with the knowledge that clients' care is being adapted to their current needs. This will also help the staff feel less overwhelmed and be able to administer the program with lower stress levels.

Expected Outcome & Assessment Plan

Communication practices between staff members will lead to a cohesive level of care for the clients at Gateway Center Day Program. Detailed information about changes in current physical and mental health of clients will be convened in an uniform chart that will be standardized for everyone to follow. This will be a resource for staff to start their shifts with credible, up to date information that can be referenced throughout their shift. Staff will be able to change how clients are cared for based on data from the communication log. Changes in the way staff works with a client with changing needs, will help staff make the accommodations needed and allow them to modify how things are done based on feedback from clients to what degree staff assistance is needed.

The communication log will be a tool that can be modified and updated as needed by staff members to enable them to document key information about how to best improve the day program environment to support the program's aging population. Data from residential care

facility staff and the medical staff of Gateway Center will be incorporated by their staff to make the log as complete as possible to have a complete picture of the client's health.

Communication logs will be assessed to determine their effectiveness in adding staff to keep up to date about clients mental and physical changes. Staff were interviewed individually about how the communication log impacted their quality of care to their client. This standardized communication effort will identify the individual's needs so that each staff member makes the same modifications in the way they care for clients so that clients can adapt to the changes and maintain a baseline level of health. For the format to be effective, each category will need to be tracked. Staff were asked questions regarding what parts of the log were helpful, what parts were not, and what improvements needed to be made to make the log more effective. Results will be compared to how this was communicated before the implementation of the capstone project and after. They were asked specifically about how effective the design of the log was, what needed to be excluded and what new items needed to be added.

Implementation Process

The communication log was developed with the help of the field study mentor, to determine categories in which Day Program clients were monitored. Taken into consideration was how the log needed to be designed to document useful information for communication purposes amongst Day program staff members. Categories included physician and behavior changes, goal attainment progress, and other developments. Staff were interviewed to include their input into what communication was needed so they were knowledgeable about changes relevant to how they cared for clients. Behavior and physical changes were the most relevant pieces of information that staff needed to know from day to day. Specifically, they need to know

how behavior has changed, including temperament changes and impacts of medications on behavior. Behavior changes may have occurred because of changes in medication they may have been on for a long time or new medications. Therefore, medication changes are among the information the staff needs to know on a regular basis. Physical changes requiring communication included injuries clients may have endured or mobility issues that may have changed due to clients getting older. The communication log was completed with mentor and Day program staff recommendations included. The mentor determined that on March fifth at three pm a staff meeting would be conducted to train Day Program staff on how to use the communication log. Staff was informed of the meeting time and date along with the purpose of the meeting. The meeting took place to explain the purpose of the project and how staff would use the communication log during the experiment. The date of implementation was announced and the quantity of communication logs needed for the duration of the experiment were delivered to each classroom. Implementation was completed over a three week period after which staff were interviewed about the effectiveness and use for staff members. Communication logs were collected from each classroom to be analyzed for the conclusion of the Capstone Report paper. The data from the communication logs will be included in the follow-up interviews that the staff will be partaking at the conclusion of the implementation. Specifically, how the data is interpreted by staff will determine how useful the information from the logs was and whether it added valuable communication.

Project Results

The log was designed and implemented successfully to improve communication between staff members. Staff saw a reduction in stress levels during their shifts because they felt better prepared to meet the needs of clients as their healthcare needs changed.

Each staff was interviewed individually after the completion of the project to determine how this new source of information benefited how they approached their shifts each day. Staff was encouraged to share what worked well and what needed to be improved or changed. Each person was able to share experiences where the information contained in the log helped them prepare for the adjustment needed to care for clients without hampering the flow of the day program. The consensus was of the twelve staff members, 90% of staff members found the information in the log saved the staff significant time in trying to figure out what healthcare changes had occurred since their last shift with the clients. The remaining 10% of staff found the information useful but would like to see more included in the information, including information from other departments. This allowed them to focus on accommodating the changes instead. Staff was able to feel confident about the adjustments needed to be made while still administering the activities of the day. Additionally, staff reported feeling more comfortable approaching management for additional training when needed to adapt to the new demands of their jobs. When asked to evaluate how their stress level was before the project versus after, 80% staff members report that their stress levels had been reduced. Those that did not report a change in their stress level stated that a longer period of time needed to pass before they could make a fair assessment. All members of the staff embraced the log and saw it as a tool that evolved to include different categories and more information. The key information they would have liked to

see included in the project was information from the residential program staff and the medical staff of Gateway Center.

The project achieved the desired outcomes to provide an effective way for the staff to communicate amongst each other to be as up to date as possible about how to accommodate clients' changing healthcare needs. The categories that had been included in the project had been designed to be modified and changed based on what information staff needed the most from day to day. Staff now feel they have the opportunity to be proactive instead of reactive in determining the way they modify how they work to make sure all clients are able to participate in the day program and independently as possible despite their changing needs.

Conclusion & Recommendations

The project showed that a formal method of communication is needed between staff members to have a cohesive knowledge base. This project proved to be an important reference for each member of the staff to refer to in order to make sure they are equipped with current information to handle clients' changing needs. The Day program staff of ten individuals reported that 90% of the time, the communication log was effective in providing pertinent information. Staff saw the communication log as a great step in improving communication in the Day Program. Although beneficial, improvements will need to be made and implemented to improve communication so staff can do their jobs in an effective manner. The Day Program staff was interviewed to determine to what degree the communication log improved transfer of information between shifts to better care for the clients needs. Improvements included incorporating information from Gateway Center's residential program staff. Information from caregivers of clients whose homes are not part of the Gateway Center community will also need to be included in the Day Program communication logs. Information from the residential

program staff and caregivers will incorporate information about clients' health and wellbeing that may have changed in the hours between the end and start of the Day program during the week and changes that may have occurred over the weekend. The onsite nurse's and a physical therapist's information on each client will also need to be included in the information that Day Program staff will receive.

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Appendix A

Project Implementation Plan

Tasks	Timeline/ Deadline	Supporting Staff	Materials Services Needed	Deliverables Completed project
Design communication log	November 2022	Robert Freiri, Gateway Center Executive Director	Google docs	Log Designed
Interview staff for recommendation for communication log	February 22, 2023	Day Program staff	notebook pen	Data for log categories of tracking compete
Complete Communication Log	March 1, 2022	Robert Freiri, Gateway Center Executive Director	4 clipboards 20 communication logs, 4 pens	Format for data to be collected
Determine staff date/time for staff meeting to implement project	March 1, 2023	Robert Freiri, Gateway Center Executive Director	None	Date of Implementation
Staff notified when capstone project meeting would take place	March 1, 2023	Robert Freiri, Gateway Center Executive Director	Completed communication log for each classroom	Confirmed staff attendance
Staff Meeting to instruction staff how project will be implemented	March 2, 2023	Robert Freiri, Gateway Center Executive Director, Chris Hunt, Day Program Manager Day Program staff	Meeting room, table, chairs Communication logs	Staff Meeting Date

Communication logs delivered to classrooms	March 3, 2023	Self	Communication logs for each day of implementation delivered	N/A
Staff to start using communication log	March 6, 2023	Day Program staff	Distribute logs to each classroom for length of experiment	Implementation
Gather communication logs	April 3, 2023	Day Program staff	None	Implementation complete
Staff followup interviews	April 3, 2023	Day Program staff	Communication logs	N/A
Complete capstone report	May 2023	Self	Laptop	Completed implementation of capstone